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INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2643
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0996
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 000526

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STATE FOR EUR/UBI, EUR/RPM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/22/2017

TAGS: PREF PTER AF IT NL

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: FOREIGN MINISTER VERHAGEN CONDEMNS
TALIBAN PRISONER EXCHANGE

REF: STATE 36204

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Schofer, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) On March 21 during a press conference in Kabul, Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen condemned the release of Taliban prisoners in exchange for Italian journalist Daniele Mastrogiovanni. Verhagen said governments should not accommodate hostage-takers, and added that the Dutch government will not give in to demands in a similar situation for fear of encouraging additional hostage situations. "When we create a situation where you can buy the freedom of Taliban fighters for a kidnapped journalist, then in the short term there will no longer be any journalists," he said.

In subsequent meetings with Ambassador Arnall and A/S Fried on March 23, Verhagen reiterated his strong views on Afghanistan.

¶2. (C) MFA Task Force Uruzgan Coordinator Pieter-Jan Kleiweg de Zwaan echoed his Minister's strong remarks to polmilooff on March 22. Kleiweg said the Dutch government does not subscribe to accommodating demands made by hostage-takers. He added this recent release of Taliban fighters sets a dangerous precedent for additional hostage-taking scenarios of individuals working for NGOs. Kleiweg said that it was "hard enough" to get international NGOs engaged at the local level, and this latest prisoner exchange will further deter international volunteers from working in southern Afghanistan.

ARNALL